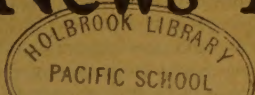


# The Christian News-Letter

Edited by  
J. H. OLDHAM



October 18th, 1944

DEAR MEMBER,

Members of H.M. Forces have been issued with forms on which to indicate that they wish to record a vote at the first Parliamentary election after the war. A similar confrontal with the necessity of accepting or rejecting a political responsibility might have the effect of causing all of us to give preliminary consideration to post-war politics.

## THE POLITICAL DOLDRUMS

It is commonly acknowledged that the period between the wars was one of decline in public interest in political matters. General elections still caused excitement, though about a quarter of the electors never voted.<sup>1</sup> Local elections created far scantier interest, the proportion of voters using their vote being only a little over one-third.<sup>2</sup> There was an alarming dearth in the number of men and women of the right calibre able to give time to serve on local councils and committees and willing to accept the dullness so often entailed. Nor were there among Parliamentary candidates more than a minority who could be placed in the first rank in ability, experience and imagination.

But there was also a widespread cynicism not only about the persons who were M.P.'s, mayors or councillors, but also about the institutions of government. Parliament was easily spoken of as "just a talking shop," or as an instrument in the hands of powerful economic interests. Mayors and councillors were commonly thought to be out for their own profit, to keep the rates down or to get a contract. But suspicions of corruption did not lead people to say "Let us throw out this lot and get a better," but made them either shrug their shoulders and ask what more you could expect of local politics, or caused them to wonder whether it wouldn't be a good plan to sweep away the whole wasteful, slightly comic business. After all the Medical Officer, the Director of Education, the Town Clerk, the Borough Engineer—these were the people who get the jobs done—why not let them do the lot?

<sup>1</sup> The exact proportion of the electorate to record a vote in Parliamentary elections was: 1922—75.4%, 1923—74.1%, 1924—80.6%, 1929—79.5%, 1931—79.8%, 1935—74.4%.

<sup>2</sup> The highest proportion of electors voting was in the County Boroughs of the North of England (50 to 60%). The lowest proportion was in the County Councils, particularly in the Southern Counties. In 1931, for example, only 27.8% of the London County Council electoral roll recorded a vote. Interest in local government is least in the suburban growths of Southern England, where community sense is at its weakest.

## REVIVING INTEREST

There are signs of a revival of interest in public affairs. One stimulus has been the war itself, jolting us out of indifference to those larger issues which in peace-time seem to impinge so little on our private lives. "What can we do to prevent this from happening again?" and "How can we make use of the chance which war gives to overhaul our social and economic life?" are questions in the minds of many. New war-time groupings in the forces, in civil defence and in industry have given men and women new chances to discuss and argue: organizations of varying types have come forward with advice, literature and other facilities to enable men and women to get a grasp of the facts and sort and rearrange their often confused opinions.

Another stimulus has been provided by the government's policy of issuing White Papers, submitting what is proposed to the public for comment before it becomes a *fait accompli*. The people's share in making policy has in the past been to choose between policies suggested by the political parties and to follow a dose of one with an ounce of another in an attempt to arrive at a good mixture. It may well be that the public policy we now need for vast reconstruction is on a scale, and must proceed at a pace, which makes the older methods impossible: if this is so, then either we must have policy made for us and put through for us, or some new method of the expression of the public will must grow up.

The process by which the Education Bill reached the statute book is a case in point. It was no party's bill; no general election put the people's wishes to the test. Yet most sections of the community got most of what they wanted. This result was reached by a form of dialectic between government and people. Thirty-eight reports on education by different sections of the public were followed by the government's first attempt at synthesis; the White Paper, and further public criticism resulted in the Bill, finally criticized and modified by Parliament. It seems possible that the practice of publishing White Papers may have initiated a new process of relating government action to public opinion.

## FROM INTEREST TO ACTION

Is this new-found interest in public affairs going to last? Will the opinions expressed in discussions become for even a minority the basis of political and social action when the war is over? For men to act in civic affairs it is necessary not only to hold certain opinions, but to hold them in association with others. None of these war-time discussions lead men directly into a political party: the war-time associations will disappear—and what will take their place?

Government by White Papers has one grave disadvantage. When schemes were put out as party programmes the obvious response of those interested was to join the party and work to put it in a position to implement its policy over against its rivals. White Paper policies do not call for an army of supporters against an army of antagonists. However interested, enthusiastic or critical a man may be, there is no



clear and obvious step for him to take. All the parties say they want the programme: they differ on questions of tempo, of means (e.g. state control, private control or both), or on technical questions beyond the ordinary man's grasp. How can the ordinary man make up his political mind—what are the criteria?

These developments—the growth of political interest among war-time groupings of people and the interest aroused by the White Papers—point to a general conclusion. They re-emphasize the political importance of non-political societies, associations and groups in two ways. First, it is by discussion in these pre-political groups that men make up their minds on political issues and by action through them, particularly in relation to local government, that they gain sureness of touch in dealing with political matters. Second, these groups can make the facts and their opinions on them directly known to the government.

There are any number of examples of this process taking place during war time. The Women's Institutes began as village groups for encouraging the arts of the home. Their constitution debarred the discussion of party-political issues. But these institutes, scattered over the whole country, became the places where women discussed the deficiencies of rural education and the shortcomings of rural housing. The movement has become, not from headquarters but from below, a body with "views," and these views they have laid before such bodies as the Scott Commission. A standing conference of women's organizations in one town raised a public agitation against its Council's housing plans. Yet another organization undertook a survey of the most pressing needs of their town: its membership sprang from 80 to 250 in a few months, and these 250 are 250 voters in local elections. This is not to deny the importance of political parties; but if political parties are to be fighting forces and not rabbles of uninstructed yes-men, they need members who from their day-to-day experience or in their professional or trade associations know the facts and have formed some conclusions as to what they want, and who bring into the parties an element of self-criticism too often lacking.

## THE CHURCH AND POLITICS

A generation or more ago it would have gone almost without saying that a man who took his religious profession seriously and who had time and ability, considered that some form of service to the community constituted a major claim on his time. He became a J.P. or a councillor: he had political views and held them without diffidence or caveats, voted consistently and knew why he did so. Such people still exist: they are mostly old or middle-aged. For the young there is no obvious connection between Christian faith and civic responsibility. There is bewilderment, doubt and uncertainty about political issues. Among students, for example, religious societies are active, but of those who belong to them only a tiny minority have any political affiliation. The reasons can only be partially discerned and scantily described. Social service and the mission field have become the "types" of Christian activity: into the voluntary organizations the Church has poured its

best, and political activities have received little or no endorsement as laudable activities for Christians to pursue. There is also among younger Christians widespread confusion on the question of power. Lord Acton's dictum has bitten deeper than any text from the Bible: "all power corrupts," therefore, let Christians leave it alone and work by persuasion. We lack the kind of moral theology which can help Christians make right decisions—how can power be used without corruption—how can a Christian work in a political party whose ends he approves and means he deplores—these questions go largely unanswered. They cannot be answered so long as Christians are afraid of political issues creeping into and dividing the Church, or take refuge in ideal schemings unrelated to the real political issues of our day.

The Church is not a political party, but it is a pre-political organization. Within the Church people should be able to discover the grounds upon which they make political, and indeed all other, decisions. The Church cannot enter the political firing-line, identifying itself with one political party, forming a party of its own, officially supporting a programme of its own. But it stands at the base: from it men and women derive their conception of justice, mercy, truth; their perception (always partial, always liable to be corrupted by sin) of the things which have to be fought against and fought for: to it they return for faith renewed and visions re-enlightened: within it common political judgments should take place. And disagreement between Christian people on means is no reflection upon the Gospel. It is pure fallacy that if all of us were fully Christian we should reach political unity, for it is as the fight proceeds that the vision grows.

So much post-war planning emanates from the centre, and so many political decisions are taken in Westminster that we may easily lose sight of the fact that the beginnings of political activity lie at our doors. Here we are not helpless, here even a single congregation can make its influence felt. But we have far to go before we can make the right relation between religion and politics, for our thinking is benumbed by our lack of action.

## THE SUPPLEMENT

Mr. Kenneth Grubb is the controller of overseas publicity at the Ministry of Information. He was for some years a missionary in South America, and is President of the Church Missionary Society, and a member of the Council of the Christian Frontier.

Yours sincerely,

*D. H. Deane*



## EUROPE—THE CHRISTIAN OUTLOOK

By KENNETH GRUBB, C.M.G.

The Christian Church has been a divided body in Europe for nearly a millennium. The Orthodox or Eastern Churches were formally separated from the Roman Catholic Church in 1054; a long existing rift then became a gulf. The medieval unity of Europe, of which so much has been written, was thus a unity of the Latin and Teutonic peoples. The Slavs, in particular the Muscovite dukedom, the principality of Kiev and the Russian and Balkan peoples generally were left outside it; Eastern Christians continued to bear the brunt of the long struggle to defend Europe from the Asiatic invasions, while Western Christendom was content to invest its energies in the Crusades. The result has been estrangement between the Churches of East and West which occasional *rapprochements* have done little to bridge. The West has been powerless to influence the secularization of the U.S.S.R. and is faced with a non-Christian Russia, flushed with power and victory, able to play, if it wishes, a leading part in the community of Europe.

The Reformation further divided the Church, and its own followers split at an early stage into the Lutheran Church in Germany and Scandinavia and the Calvinist or Reformed Church in France, Switzerland and Holland.

Any statistical assessment of this situation can only be an intelligent guess at inaccessible (and often meaningless) facts. But very broadly and vaguely (especially in the case of the U.S.S.R.) the population of Europe<sup>1</sup> is divided as follows. Under 40 per cent have a Roman Catholic background; some 15 per cent an Orthodox background, and somewhat more a Protestant one; 2 per cent are Jews and 2 per cent Moslems. The remainder cannot be classified by the vague category of "background." Thus, it is not only the unity, but also the size of the Roman Catholic Church which makes it the central religious factor in the reconstruction of Europe; except in Northern Germany, Scandinavia and the Northern Netherlands, it provides the religious background of all Western Europe. As for the Protestants, the Lutheran Churches form more than three-quarters of their strength: the Reformed Churches, with their distinctive outlook towards the State, their lively but controversial tendencies in theological thinking, their divisive habits and their vigorous interest in the task of reconstruction, are only one-fifth to one-sixth of continental Protestants. These figures have no very great significance, but are useful as a correction to false perspectives. Let them, however, be compared with other and more revealing

<sup>1</sup> Europe is used throughout to indicate the Continent excluding Britain.

facts—with the disastrous apostasies among Lutheran church bodies in Germany, and the fall of Orthodoxy since 1917 in Russia. In France some Catholic authorities do not claim for the Church more than 25 per cent of the population. Or one might note Cardinal Spellman's remark that only force keeps the Spanish people in allegiance with the Church.

Probably the single most important historical fact about the religious situation in Europe is its imperviousness to religious influences. Like an ageing tortoise, it has capacity for decay but is inaccessible to stimuli. Since the Reformation, religious situations have been changed by force and statecraft rather than spiritual devotion or evangelism; but for the last two hundred years, since the cessation of the ways of religion, there has been a stalemate. It is true that here and there Churches have gained and lost at each other's expense, and some evangelistic agencies have worked untiringly. Separatist movements have, indeed, been created, but have generally soon lost their impetus and their goal of general awakening has been indefinitely deferred. It is true that all Communion (not excluding the Orthodox) have contributed to an immensely vital but extra-European movement of Church expansion, but their challenge to the Church has not deepened the loyalty of the Christian community at home as a whole. So far, Western social distress, political upheaval, renewal of Christian thought and leadership, campaigns of evangelization, the energies of inter-confessional movements have not availed to work positive change. The Churches, however, can no longer be protected from decay by the State and, after two centuries, epidemic secularisation is the first outstanding movement to affect their life generally.

## THE EUROPEAN CHURCHES DURING THE WAR

Any consideration of the future of the European Churches must take into account their record during the war years. In two cases the situation is such that they must be considered separately. These two are Germany and Russia. The remaining countries (i.e., in the main, the countries which have been occupied) present a broadly similar picture and can be considered as a whole.

### *Germany*

We can assume in the general confusion of German life after the war the emergence of all those groups and individuals who have been secret or open critics of National Socialism during the last eleven years. The Churches, Protestant and Roman Catholic, include in their membership the most open and courageous critics of the Nazi way of life. On the Roman Catholic side there is the heritage of the long struggle over the schools, the controversy over the immorality trials, and the open opposition to the Nazi race philosophy, exemplified in such documents as *Mit brennender Sorge*. Flaming con-



demnations of the Gestapo within Germany have come from Roman Catholic Bishops like Count von Galen of Muenster. On the Protestant side there is the Confessional movement, largely broken up as an outward organization, but still influential. The fact that hundreds of German pastors have, at one time or another, been imprisoned by the Nazis will not be forgotten at the moment of Nazi collapse. All this resistance is, of course, quite compatible with an identification of German Church and German Nation. This has received an impetus during the war, and it must not be expected that the German clergy will rush out to greet the Allied armies as their long-looked-for liberators.

### *Russia*

Here the war has led to a definite and marked increase in the influence and prestige of the Church. Perhaps contrary to expectation, the Russian Church came out boldly in support of the war for the defence of the Russian fatherland, and as a sequel, if not as a consequence, the Church has gone from strength to strength and is now restored to a measure of freedom. Only in economic and educational matters is the Church seriously handicapped. If the Russian Church can really find its plan in the life of modern industrialized Russia there is no reason why its influence should not grow in the coming years.

### *The Occupied Countries*

In the occupied countries the Churches have proved important centres of resistance to the New Order. This resistance has taken widely different forms. In Norway there has been a unanimous decision on the part of the Church to resist domination by the Quisling Government. In Holland the Churches have protested on moral issues like anti-Semitism and the deportation of Dutch citizens. In Denmark the Churches have been allied with a very vigorous national movement of resistance. Clerical blood has flowed in the struggle. In France, the picture has been a divided one. At first the Roman Catholic leaders sided with Pétain in his acceptance of the armistice and in his plans for the revival of France through subjugation and penitence. This attitude has been greatly modified as German intentions have become clearer and the native resistance of the junior clergy, e.g. the priests in Brittany, has come to count for more. The division has not been between Catholic and Protestant, for both on the Catholic and Protestant sides there have been collaborators and resisters. Church resistance in France, however, has certainly increased as the years of occupation have proceeded. In the Balkans some Churches, e.g. the Greek Church, have been closely identified with the national struggle. Countries like Yugoslavia unfortunately have provided examples of internal ecclesiastical strife, e.g. between Catholic Croats and Orthodox

Serbs. It should be remembered that in Yugoslavia it was the Serb Orthodox Patriarch, Gavril, who issued the call to arms when Yugoslavia was immediately threatened by Germany. Marshal Tito's movement has Orthodox supporters, but it is probable that the higher clergy remain loyally attached to the Royal Yugoslav Government.

Taking the picture as a whole it is certainly true that Church influence has been on the increase in Europe during the war years. A secularly-minded government, such as that which left Norway in 1940, will return to a country where anti-clericalism will certainly be unpopular and out-moded. The Dutch Church has certainly qualified in a new way for the up-to-date leadership of its people. A good deal will depend on how far the Churches are able to show themselves independent of sectional interests and bourgeois domination, and how far, on the other hand, they can win the allegiance of those progressive elements which are nevertheless anxious to retain the historic Christian character of European culture.

## THE OUTLOOK

### (a) *The Post-war Framework*

The problem of Europe is no longer that of its former cultural unity. This has so far broken down as to make it impossible to restore it. The puzzle can be fitted together, but the picture will be different—it will be a composite group rather than a single portrait. The first task is not to rack the brain over the spiritual destitution of Russia, or the justice of the Spanish regime, but to restore ordered life to disordered masses—in the Balkans, in Germany or in Western Europe. When institutions and governments have been developed, machinery can be devised, not to weld them together, but to hold them in some peaceful relationship. Only then can we hope to acquire the necessary preliminary understandings to renew and pursue the search for a common purpose and way of life—based in the West on the discovery of the disciplined meaning of freedom, and in the East (possibly) on a wider freedom within political and social discipline. If we succeed in this endeavour, there may be some chance of progress in the subsequent problem of unification.

The obvious danger of to-morrow is the division of Europe into two camps, the East led by the U.S.S.R., the West led by Britain. An only slightly recovered Germany would then eventually exercise a decisive weight. The Anglo-Soviet Treaty provides a certain guarantee against this, and it is a possibility which gives added importance to the attempt to bridge the difference between Eastern and Western Christianity. The problem of Germany in itself is as much Russia's problem as anyone else's. The question How united is Germany? must be asked in the historical, territorial and political senses.

Finally, the U.S.S.R. still remains an enigma. My own view is that Russia does not desire too prominent a part in continental



affairs, but defined and secure boundaries, peace for internal development and a dominant interest in East European questions. Her attitude to religion will be a development of her present view. The State is secure in its own strength, esteems the Church for its historical contribution to the nation, and finds that it has propaganda value in the West. The Church enjoys its limited freedom, realizes its national mission and is genuinely concerned to make a religious contribution to a people sorely tried by suffering and bereavement in war. The people, or some of them, welcome both the religious mysticism and aesthetic appeal of the liturgy, and the recovery of a genuinely national institution. The Church, in spite of all it has lost, has recovered and holds a position of semi-independence in the Union not enjoyed by any other institution. Within the sphere of Christian relationships some contribution can therefore be made to mitigating the estrangement of the last twenty years between the opposite camps in continental Europe and Britain.

The immediate constructive tasks in Europe seem to fall into two broad groups. The need of relief and reconstruction is apparent, although it may vary in intensity. In the field of relief, the official organizations, such as UNRRA, are ready for action; in that of reconstruction there are not only the ravages of war to repair, but also the broad structural problems, such as the Danube Basin, which demand political and economic solution. Secondly, there is the task now in process of building up institutions and organizations of international scope. Progress has already been made with this at such conferences as Bretton Woods, and more is likely to be achieved in the near future. In this field of international understandings the question is sometimes raised whether any provision should be made in peace settlements for "religious liberty." "Religious liberty" in Europe is in practice a function or a result of some relationship, usually an uneasy tension, between Church and State. The subject has been covered elsewhere (e.g. the reports of the Oxford Conference); it is sufficient to point the deduction that, given the condition of Europe, there is no satisfactory definition of "religious liberty" and no way to secure it. In the British or American understanding of the term, there is not "religious liberty" in the U.S.S.R.; in the Russian Communist view there is, and the Church in Russia would agree. President Roosevelt's "Four Freedoms" speech (January, 1941) first gave popular expression to what is supposed to be at stake in the war: "Freedom of every person to worship God in his own way," an ideal, according to the President. The Atlantic Charter ignores the subject. The Washington Declaration states that "complete victory . . . is essential to defend . . . religious liberty." Other speeches by the President also refer to the subject. But there is nothing much in all this beyond hopes and ideals. Some good might, therefore, be done by efforts

to secure that a Peace Settlement include an obligation to guarantee certain basic rights considered indispensable by Christians and others, both for their own corporate life and that of other people. But this would more suitably come as part of any general instrument associating the nations in an international organization. It does not seem necessary to assume that the U.S.S.R. would oppose.

Can any clue be given as to what may be the main challenge to Christian life and influence in post-war Europe? Only broadly, as the present is so unlike the past, and the future hard to foresee. The chief crisis for religion will probably be in the Balkans, owing to Russian influence. Orthodoxy will lose further ground; while Roman Catholicism may well gain in Poland, owing to its "historic mission" as a constituent of Polish nationalism. In the West: it is just possible that both Protestantism and Roman Catholicism may witness a spiritual awakening and fresh wrestling with the tasks of Christian thought and life. It is equally likely, however, that in Germany despair will infect even Christians, who may either abandon faith or move to Pietism.

On the other hand, the record of the Church as an institution which has resisted tyranny will stand it in good stead. At least it should dispel the illusion that an individual Christian attitude can be effective without any link with the worshipping community. The Churches may thus gather strength, and if their organization is responsive to the demands of a spiritual life developed out of hardship and suffering, their prospects *may* be reasonably good, and their hold on the young recovered. It is worth notice, in passing, that there may be points, most of them fairly obvious, at which Christians in Great Britain can assist in this rebuilding of religious life. In general, relations between Britain and the Continent have, in this field, fallen into four broad categories: relations between communions, e.g. between Anglican and Orthodox Churches, or the Church of Scotland and the Reformed Church of Hungary, etc.; participation in general movements such as the World's Y.M.C.A., the World Student Christian Federation; participation in the so-called "Ecumenical movement" exemplified in such conferences as Edinburgh and Oxford; and the presence on the Continent of missions of relief and fellowship, e.g., the Friends.

A large-scale effort for inter-church aid is now being undertaken. The department for reconstruction and inter-church aid of the World Council of Churches is planning a far-reaching reconstruction policy on an ecumenical basis. Towards this the Churches in Great Britain, through their Committee for Christian Reconstruction in Europe, are contributing a sum of £1,000,000, towards which more than £300,000 has already been received or promised from the leading denominations and other sources.



## (b) *The Spiritual Task*

No confident analysis can be made of the general state and temper of liberated Europe. The available evidence from France justifies a diagnosis less pessimistic than has often been given; but France is in many ways not typical, and, in the early days of liberation, the deep moral lessons are not probed. Germany still shows a strange combination of confident fanaticism and blank indifference based on ignorance, but increasingly tinged with scepticism and despair. Certain assumptions can reasonably be made. For the last five years, authority has been widely identified with tyranny, with inevitable consequences. Violence is necessarily held to be the chief attribute of manliness and plotting the most justifiable means to freedom. Revenge takes precedence over moderation and words are chiefly fair when they conceal subversive ends. Men have found that they can master the unjust law, and the fatal consequence may well follow: "Men too often take upon themselves in the prosecution of their revenge to set the example of doing away with those general laws to which all alike can look for salvation in adversity, instead of allowing them to subsist against the day and danger when their aid may be required" (Thucydides).

To restore respect for law is, therefore, urgent, but it may be even more requisite to restore hope in God as an essential prelude to all faith and will to good. Without hope the dissolution of European culture cannot be avoided. To many men, if the agonies of the past are to be repeated, the game of life is hardly worth the candle; it would be preferable to roll up the map of experience and cast away the precious with the vile. The declining birth-rate, the sense of personal insignificance, the blank conviction, however illogical, that the machine cannot be controlled, the distrust of all information and of man-pledged word, all point in this direction. Akin to this are also scepticism about "reconstruction" and the sense of political frustration among minorities.

Even if the decay of freedom into libertinage can be avoided, a weighty preoccupation of the Churches in Europe will remain in the form of secularism. We do not yet know how much farther the corrosion of faith has advanced during the war years. The Churches have given remarkable examples of heroism and stern fidelity to beliefs which they hold dear and firm. The tragic ordeal of persecution must have brought not a few men to seek courage in prayer. But devastation by violence, the indiscriminating element in modern war, and the hardening of natural sensibilities, all blunt the edge of hope and conscience, and destroy pity, the parent of love. Thus the drift to secularism, indifference and moral unresponsiveness is much more dangerous than the menace of communism. The belief that communism is the most sinister foe of Christianity has, in Europe, proved a fatal form of self-deception, for in the struggle scores of

Christians have perished, not by the hand of this enemy, but by the insidious contagion in their own camp. It is a belief which, so far from dying a natural death, is likely to have a new lease of life. It will, moreover, grow with the spread of education, for education on the Continent seems certain to offer no solution for this particular difficulty. If it is Christian, it will nourish the sense of hostility to communism and obscure the real evil ; if it is secular, it will inflame its own infection.

All this, more or less gravely, is the concomitant of every major war. The seriousness of the issue to-day is startlingly enhanced by the inadequacy of the forces of spiritual reconstruction. In the midst of the general disintegration of religious life we are faced with the present crisis, and it is difficult to see where the resources for counter attack can be found. These burning issues in Europe are at bottom attitudes of the mind and heart, of behaviour and conduct. They can be ultimately moulded only through faith in God (or its absence) and a consequent view of man. They are religious issues ; but, as we have seen, a deep historical intractability dogs the religious situation of the Continent ; it is changed by corrosion, but not by construction. It seems inaccessible to the best desires, the highest hopes, the broadest plans, and the most solemn prayers. Amid these complex political constellations of "interests" and power, action evaporates in exasperation, and patience succumbs to despair. Meanwhile, the tremendous legacy of suffering and lawlessness accumulates. Few there are, after five years of Nazi tyranny, who would venture to take the measure and plumb the depths of European need. Journalists speak of the "Soul of Europe," "The European Tradition" ; it is difficult to find them except tortured and maimed beyond recognition. What is there in common between the turpitude of Bulgaria and the brave resistance of Norway ? Perhaps, after all, even after three years of struggle or chaos, the answer lies in some measure of the leaven of the Christian faith. But whether this deposit is not worn too thin for recovery and whether it can be made ever to feed a new growth of Christian life and achievement, no man can certainly decide.

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